

BAB VERDUGO

The Man Behind The Bridle

Vaquero, wagonmaster, and trainer of Morgans for more than 50 years.

By Brenda L. Tippin

THE VERDUGO FAMILY AND VAQUERO HISTORY

Juan Bautiste Fortino Verdugo, known to his friends and family as “Bab,” was born in Los Nietos, California on August 12, 1913. He was one of five children born to Antonio and Barbara Verdugo, and from the time he was a small toddler, his special interest in horses was apparent. When Bab was born, his father was teaming on a ranch near Whittier, a profession that was a family tradition. So it was that handling wagons and driving horses were among Bab’s earliest skills, which soon expanded to riding and working with cattle. By the time he was in his teens, young Bab was working on local ranches, learning all he could of the vaquero ways to which he was a natural heir.

The Verdugo family traced its roots to the earliest California vaquero history, descending from Jose Maria Verdugo, born in 1751 in Spanish Colonial Loreto, Baja California, Mexico. This Verdugo ancestor and his brother Mariano de la Cruz Verdugo were among the original pioneers who traveled to California with Father Junipero Serra in 1769. Jose Maria, just 18 years old at the time was a “soldado de cuera,” or “leather-jacket soldier.” The *soldado de cuera* wore a type of leather armor, which was a knee-length, multi-layered leather coat for protection from Indian arrows. Also, each *soldado de cuera* wore a leather apron of sorts, which the Spanish called “*armas*” or “*defensas*,” fastened to the pommel of the saddle and hanging down on both sides to protect the thighs and legs in

Clockwise from top left: Bab Verdugo and Brookwood JP Dan (Dapper Dan x Linden’s Last), Plymouth, 1979; Garn Walker, Bab and Eitan Beth-Halachmy at Mother Lode; Bab and Count Basie (U C Viscount x Mad River Windsong); Bab at five years, 1919. Photos courtesy June Verdugo.

thickets and woods. His equipment consisted of a shield, musket, sword, dagger, lance, and two pistols. The Spanish considered the *soldado de cuera* to be the best horseman in the world. It was from these early pioneers that the traditions of the California vaquero were instilled.

California's vast unpopulated areas first began to be settled with a chain of 21 Spanish missions founded over a period of 54 years along the *El Camino Real*, known as the Royal Highway. This 600-mile historic route, also known as the King's Highway, was under the rule of the Spanish crown. It ran from *Mission San Diego de Alcalá* in San Diego, which was the first to be established by Father Serra on July 16, 1769, to *Mission San Francisco Solano* in Sonoma on the north end, and represents California's first road. According to legend, Father Serra and his mission fathers planted wild mustard seeds along the route so they could follow the fields of blooming yellow mustard flowers back down the coast to find their way back to the first mission and return to Mexico. These missions were followed by land grants which supported ranchos and large cattle operations, which were still widely scattered across the California Bab Verdugo knew in his early days.

The first segment of the *El Camino Real* was paved in San Bruno in 1912, just one year before Bab was born, and 450 mission bells were placed along the route (California 101) by the El Camino Real Association in the early 1900s. The original *El Camino Real* bells were produced by Mrs. A.S.C. Forbes, America's first woman bell maker. They were spaced along the *El Camino Real* route to be a one-day journey apart by horse.

Bab's mother, Barbara Duran, was of Yaqui Indian heritage, a people whose history was closely intertwined with these early missions, and who were among the very first of the old vaqueros trained by the Spaniards. It was she who recognized Bab's rare gift of working with horses and understanding them, and she did all she could to nourish and foster that talent from the time he was small.

The vast cattle ranches continued to dominate the land for many years, and Bab's first job and all that followed were with horses, working on many large ranchos along the old *El Camino Real* route his ancestor had traveled. Among the ranches he worked were those owned by Miller & Lux, and numerous others. Many of these ranches used Morgans or part-Morgans, as they were superior for working cattle. The vaqueros favored the Morgans as they resembled most closely the horses of the Conquistadors both in their style and beauty, as well as their ability to perform the work the vaqueros demanded. This is not surprising, as the original Justin Morgan horse shared many of the same characteristics as these Spanish Conquistador horses.

RANCHO DE LOS VERDUGOS AND THE VERDUGO MOUNTAINS

By the time Bab was a young boy attending school in Southern California, the Verdugos descending from Jose Maria Verdugo were widely dispersed. Although they no longer possessed the ranchlands, and his father had to work hard for a living, Bab was proud to be descended from this early pioneer and was fascinated with the stories passed down through his family. In 1784, his

BAB VERDUGO THROUGH THE YEARS



Top to bottom: Bab Verdugo in a christening gown, Los Nietos 1915; Bab and Clyde Kennedy, Carmel Valley; A cart presentation in Monterrey, 1973; An afternoon siesta; Bab and his dog Elsie, 1990; Babs' last birthday party. Photos courtesy June Verdugo.

WORKING RANCH YEARS



Top to bottom: Bab Verdugo's first bridle horse Amigo, 1931; Bab and Fravo Jamestown, 1947; Bab and Rudy (a Miller and Lux horse), 1940; Bab and Polamar at the O & O Ranch (Lewis Oniol), 1936. Photos courtesy June Verdugo & Joanne Curtis.

ancestor Jose Maria Verdugo was a veteran of Spain's 1779-1783 war with England, and was Corporal in charge of Mission San Gabriel's guards. He was one of three Spanish soldiers who first petitioned Alta Californian Governor Pedro Fages for land to graze their livestock, as it was an ancient custom of many countries to reward land or land privileges to soldiers in exchange for military service. His permit was granted in October of that year, and Jose Maria chose 36,403 acres of land, located north of Pueblo de Los Angeles and nestled between Missions San Fernando Rey and San Gabriel, and included the Verdugo Mountains or Verdugo Hills, which were also named after him. These are the present day areas known as Glendale, Highland Park, Eagle Rock, York Valley, Casa Verdugo, and much of Burbank. Jose Maria named the land La Zanja (the ditch), which later became known as the Rancho de los Verdugos or Rancho San Rafael. This was located less than 25 miles from where Bab was born, and the mountains which bore his name were well-known to him.

Much of this area is still preserved today in the Verdugo Mountain Park and adjacent Verdugo Mountains Open Space Preserve, which connects more than 500 acres of open preserve on the north side of the Verdugo mountains to thousands of acres of public parkland and access to an extensive network of trails including those open to horses. This includes the Verdugo Mountainway, a popular trail which travels the crest of the Verdugo Mountains to the city of Glendale, offering spectacular views of the San Fernando Valley and city of Los Angeles, providing a taste of how the land appeared in Bab's boyhood days.

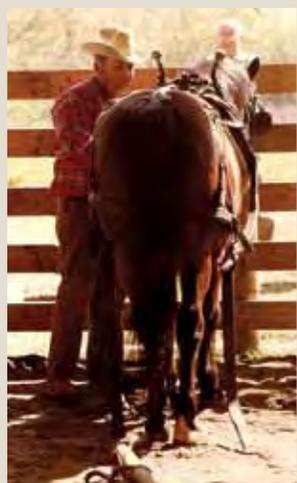
Bab's ancestor Jose Maria retired from the military and moved to the rancho in 1799, which prospered for many years. On July 28, 1817 Jose Maria reported to Governor Sola that he possessed on Rancho San Rafael:

- 1,800 head of large stock;
- 100 head of small stock;
- 800 head of wild horses;
- 70 broken or tame horses;
- 20 head of broken or tame mules;
- 50 head of wild mules.

Jose Maria rode with his vaqueros, exploring every corner of the rancho, as he was fond of saying, "the true home of every Californian is in the saddle." He died in 1831 with his stock including 5,000 cattle and 500 horses and mares. The rancho was divided between his son Julio, who chose the south half, and daughter Catalina, who chose the north half. Julio continued as the patriarch of the rancho, assisted by his thirteen sons, and Catalina, now completely blind, was assisted by her various nephews.

The California gold rush in 1849 brought prosperity to *Rancho de los Verdugos*, and Julio spent his large cattle profits on gracious living, fancy clothes, silver ornamented saddles, bridles, coats and breeches. He also enjoyed hosting fandangos and rodeos. Julio was known as a flashy dresser and enjoyed making the most of opportunities to display his elegant costumes. Election days were important days to make the most of such occasions. He would ride at a fast gallop into the pueblo of Los Angeles, astride a stunning

BAB'S HORSES



Top three: Bab and Lippitt Gregory (Lippitt George Moro x Lippitt Ethan Ann). **Bottom two:** Copper Jacket (tracing to Indian Chief and a sister of Golddust) in Danville, 1967; Bab and Patrick L G Carter (Lippitt Gregory x Cherry River) in Reno, 1978. Photos courtesy June Verdugo.

horse whose bridle and saddle were richly adorned with the best of Mexican silver. Julio's costume would include a low-crowned *sombrero* with a flat, stiff, wide brim, a colorful *bandana*, or handkerchief tied about his neck, a black velvet *chauqueta* or jacket with rows of gold buttons, and his trousers would be split to the knees on the side, with fancy stitches to match his coat. Following would be his thirteen sons, all mounted on equally beautiful steeds and similarly dressed in velvet clothes decorated with elaborate gold braid and silver buttons that glinted in the sun as they rode.

These were the stories young Bab heard from his father, mother, uncles and cousins, capturing his imagination by strengthening his fascination with the vaquero culture and serving as a model for the dress he himself would often wear later when competing in Western shows.

However, the time of prosperity for *Rancho de los Verdugos* was brief, with California admitted to statehood in 1850. Ownership had to be proved yet again, and with it came heavy taxes. Terrible floods were experienced in 1861-62, followed by two years of unprecedented drought, and in 1863 a plague of grasshoppers which destroyed everything in their path. As cattle prices plummeted, Julio had been forced to mortgage the rancho, and the loan came due with interest amidst all these natural disasters, resulting in foreclosure after years of bitter legal battles. In 1871 it was divided into thirty-one partitions, with Julio only retaining 200 acres, and Catalina and Julio's son Teodoro, the main nephew assisting his blind aunt, retaining 3,300 acres. Catalina died in 1871 before this final decision was made, followed by Julio in 1876. Teodoro died in 1904 and the remaining property was eventually acquired by the city of Glendale and made into an historic landmark. And so most of the rancho was lost to members of the Verdugo family, but the rich vaquero traditions lived on.

BAB'S EARLY YEARS

At 17, Bab got his first taste of working cattle in the Mother Lode, a 120-mile stretch running from Georgetown to El Dorado through the Amador, Calaveras, and Tuolumne counties. And by the time he was just 18 years old in 1931, Bab had already trained his first bridle horse, a process that generally required a good five years of training for the unhurried vaquero. This horse, called "Amigo," was Bab's first Morgan, though his full identity is lost to history. Bab had carefully trained Amigo to work straight up in the bridle, using the old vaquero methods he learned from his mentors at the various ranches where he had worked. Bab went on to work on many large ranches in the Livermore and Santa Cruz area, and would tell stories of riding for hours from one ranch to another at night without ever coming to a fence, or seeing any lights except in the far, far distance.

Through years of hard work, Bab continued to add to his vaquero skills, specializing in training these horses. Morgans he worked with during the 1940s included the Hearst-bred stallion Kenelm Morgan (Mountcrest Sellman x Sunbeam Maid), which he trained for Charles McGonegal's Sunol Morgan ranch, as well as the mare Betsy Joaquin (Joaquin Morgan x Bessie Dix). This mare, registered as dun, was in fact, one of the rare silver dapples of the

BAB'S TACK & EQUIPMENT



Top to bottom: Bab Verdugo wearing leather chaparraras and botas he made himself with Fonda KR (King's River Morgan x Royce's Falcon); Leather botas and chaparraras made by Bab; Bab's Silver Hatband with Two Hearts brand; A leather hat and book made for Bab; Photos courtesy Brenda Tippin, June Verdugo & Deb Beth-Halachmy.

Morgan breed, and was trained by Bab as a working ranch mare. Another special horse Bab trained in the old California vaquero style was the beautiful palomino son of Red Vermont, Jubilee Gold, foaled in 1941. Both he and his dam, Ramona B, were registered in the Morgan section of the palomino registry, and never registered as Morgans although they would have been eligible under Rule II. Ramona B had numerous lines to old Morgan blood including Copperbottom, Tom Hal, Davy Crocket, Black Hawk, Daniel Lambert, Charles Reade, Vermont Morgan, Golddust, and more. He was one of many early California Morgans absorbed into the Palomino registry.

Bab was active in competition as well, and rode the two-day Concord-Mt Diablo Trail ride four times—winning second place twice. In 1945 he received the Ray M. Walsh gold cup, as well as the Senior Horsemanship Silver Cup for this ride. Bab first met his wife June at a fair, and they were married in Carson City, Nevada, in May 1951. Bab and June settled in Plymouth, California, where they built the Verdugo Ranch. This was soon a full time business for Bab, offering wagons and teams for hire, raising and training stock for sale, supplying stock for trail rides, and training and competing with show horses for many influential clients. Sometimes, during the 1950s, Bab appeared with the horses he trained in old Western movies and television shows. Joanne Curtis, who knew Bab well, particularly remembers him being in a Civil War movie called *Come Next Spring*, as well as appearing occasionally on the *Grey Ghost* TV series.

Another activity Bab enjoyed was participating in the Highway 50 Wagon Train reenactment that traveled each year along Highway 50 from Lake Tahoe to Placerville. Bab was a regular participant in this event through the 1950s and early 1960s, and many of the horses that participated were trained by him, as well.

HORSES BAB TRAINED

Bab trained several horses for Joanne Curtis, including Dusty Silverton, Jubilee Jazz, Serena Suzette, and Jubilee Rhythm. She gives him credit for being instrumental with helping her get started in her La Serena Morgans breeding program. Joanne recalls Bab's horse Copper Jacket:

"Copper Jacket was not a palomino. He was a golden chestnut with white mane and tail. He was small, around 14.2 and compact, with a beautiful head and neckset, very smooth Morgan body, beautiful Morgan trot, and looked very much like Red Vermont. He looked so much like a Morgan that Art Perry asked Bab why he didn't register him, assuming he was a Morgan. He was a finished reining horse and was finished with a spade bit. Bab used to give us demonstrations free lunging him with voice commands. When our stallion Jubilee Rhythm was at Bab's for training, he had them trained to lunge free together loose in the arena using voice commands. Bab had a brand of two hearts hooked together, and Copper had the brand on one hip. His sire was a palomino or light sorrel/flaxen stallion named King Copper, who Bab trained for Earl Dahl, his partner in the Dahl-Verdugo Stables for horseshows in Northern California. King Copper had been bred by Jack Davis at a time when Jack owned both Red Vermont, foaled in 1934, and

the palomino El Moreno, who was foaled in 1931. Bab told me the El Moreno palominos descended from old California Spanish blood with some of the old Saddlebred lines that had a lot of early Morgan blood. El Moreno had many of these old Morgan crosses including Indian Chief and the full sister of Golddust. Also, El Moreno's dam was an early quarter horse that was a granddaughter of Peter McCue who was suspected of being a Morgan. Bab had King Copper at his old place and he died there. So, that may be why Copper Jacket looked like Red Vermont. Or, maybe his sire King Copper was sired by Red Vermont when Jack Davis owned both El Moreno and Red Vermont.

"I suspect that Red Vermont was really the sire of King Copper, as his son Copper Jacket looked identical to Red Vermont, except Red Vermont was a darker color, and Red Vermont was there at Davis's at the time King Copper was sired."

Other horses Bab was known for working with included Brookwood JP Dan (Dapper Dan x Linden's Last). This horse was owned by John Bennett, but spent his entire life with Bab. Joanne Curtis notes that Bab had developed him into a finished reining horse, trained to work in a spade bit in the old California tradition. JP Dan's wins included the 1969 Golden West Morgan National Horse Show in Monterey, and he was still winning ten years later.

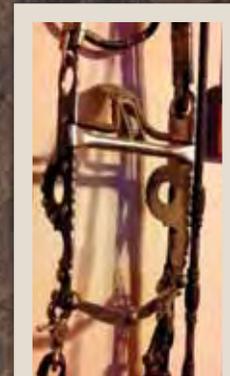
Fonda K R (King's River Morgan x Royce's Falcon), a lovely dark brown mare foaled in 1959, owned by Jack and Evelyn Herrod, was another one Bab trained as a fully finished bridle horse, and he competed with her in roadster classes, as well. Bab competed with Morgans in a wide range of classes from in-hand to Western pleasure, driving, roadster, obstacle driving, and carriage classes, and was successful in all. He was presented with a cart at the 1973 Golden West Morgan National Horse Show in Monterey. At the Mother Lode Horse Show, the Bab Verdugo Perpetual Trophy for Gambler's Choice was named after him.

Joanne Curtis recalls her memories of Bab:

"My dear friend and mentor, Bab Verdugo, was a descendant of one of California's oldest families. The Verdugos had first settled in southern California in the 1700s, and at one time owned a huge ranch of thousands of acres. The family legend, according to Bab, was that one of his ancestors lost it all in a card game. Originally from Spain, they had brought the Spanish tradition of Renaissance horsemanship with them, and it was that tradition that had been carried down through the generations to Bab. It was the same style of horsemanship that one sees in the old castle paintings in Spain, and the same style from which the Spanish Riding School evolved. That was the basis of Bab Verdugo's training, and that gave rise to a preference for a baroque style of Morgan horse in California. Both the original Spanish horses of California and the colonial horses from England from which the Morgan ancestors came were descendants of the Spanish Barbs.

"Bab said that the natural arch and set of the Morgan neck made it very easy to "bit" a Morgan horse, and the correct biting was essential to a light mouth and a collected horse. A horse finished in Western style by Bab was trained almost as if in classical

BAB'S TACK & EQUIPMENT



Top to bottom: The Verdugo Riding School; Bab Verdugo bridles, spade bit and equipment owned by Eitan and Debbie Beth-Halachmy; Old Mexican Silver conches on leather work made by Bab. Photos courtesy Brenda Tippin, June Verdugo & Deb Beth-Halachmy.

MORGANS BAB TRAINED



Top to bottom: E F M Desperado (EFM Odin x Woodside Celebrity); Jubilee Gold (Red Vermont x Ramona B) a palomino who would have been eligible for Morgan registry under Rule II; Bab and Serena Suzette (Eco Jubilo x Bonnie Heather), 1st fillies at the Golden West National Morgan Horse Show, 1968; Bab and Brookwood JP Dan, Golden West Morgan Horse National, 1969; Bab and Dusty Silverton (Silverton Morgan x Princess Firefly); Bab and Betsy Joaquin (Joaquin Morgan x Bessie Dix), 1947. Photos courtesy of Joanne Curtis & June Verdugo.

dressage of the European renaissance. The neck was perfectly set, the horse light in hand, and perfectly balanced under the rider. This was a style that had begun to disappear in Morgan circles in California by the 1960s, as Quarter Horse style judges were used in both open and Morgan shows. Although Bab had been training Morgans since the 1930s, he was rediscovered by a new generation of California Morgan owners by 1970, and Bab helped to turn the style of Morgan showing in California back to the baroque style.

“We often had prominent European and British horsemen and horsewomen visit us when we lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, and we always took them to visit Bab and to see the Morgans he was training. This was a time when Parade and other Broadwall Morgans were touring with the Lipizzaners from the Spanish Riding School, so European dressage experts were interested in seeing Morgans. Over the years we took several of those dressage experts to visit Bab, and they were fascinated to find that his training methods and the resulting finished horses were right out of classical European dressage. I recall some that only meant to give him a brief visit and ended up spending all day with him and nearly missed their planes.

“Bab’s training methods were quiet, calm, and never pushed the horse. His aim was to give the owner a safe, quiet horse that the owner could handle and show themselves. He would never stir up a horse to win a class. I remember horses of ours that were trained by Bab that stood quietly and looked puzzled at the antics of other horses rearing and prancing around them. Bab said that it was more important that the horse stay safe, calm, and compatible with the owner than to win the class. Another saying of his: “Never let another person borrow your horse, as it is like letting someone borrow your razor.” In that he meant that once you have this wonderfully trained animal, don’t let someone else with different hands borrow it and ruin it.

“Another specialty of Bab’s was making house calls. Our horses were there for three or four weeks, until safely started, and then came home for us to get started together. Bab would often stop by to check on how we were doing or would come by if we had problems. That way the horse did not have to stay away for months.

“That reminds me of our first horse show attempt at driving our big gelding, Dusty Silverton, one of Bab’s favorites. We had a fine harness buggy, and my husband at the time got to the show early with the horses and decided to hitch up Dusty. The horse was snoozing, tied to the trailer, and suddenly woke up to find that he was hitched to the buggy. He startled and went straight up in the air. Facing the trailer, there was no way to turn him around. Out of nowhere Bab appeared and somehow got him turned around. My husband drove him, and we got a second in the class. In another driving incident, our big stallion Eco Jubilo had only been at Bab’s for driving training for a few weeks. Art Jones (husband of the well-known Morgan owner Gloria Jones) needed a horse to drive in a society wedding, and he wanted to borrow Jubilo. Bab said it was fine, he was all trained. We were hesitant, but Jubilo went to the wedding, pulling Art’s antique buggy to carry the bride and groom. When the wedding party came out of the church, there

were cheers, rice throwing, and flash bulbs. Jubilo braced his feet and we prayed. Off he shot like a bolt, settled down, and they trotted through the lovely palm shaded streets and mansions at the foot of Mount Diablo without incident.”

THE DANVILLE RIDING SCHOOL

From 1969-79, Bab and June lived in Danville, California, where they established the Verdugo Riding School. Bab built a barn there, and continued to train and show horses and offer riding lessons. Several ladies he gave group riding lessons for still remember him well, and refer to Bab as the “Original Horse Whisperer.” Bab had a unique gift when it came to working with horses, and his wife June explains, despite the rich heritage of his vaquero ancestors, he was the only one in his immediate family who had this natural ability and interest in studying and training the horses. June recalls, “His father would come and watch him compete sometimes, but said little. It was his mother who encouraged him. Sometimes, Bab would ask his brother Gilbert to come and help him with a horse, and he seemed to know what to do, but none of them had the interest in it that Bab had. There was an elderly black gentleman from Carmel, named Buford Clark. Bab considered this man one of his greatest mentors and held him in high regard. Bab knew him for many years, and the last time we saw him was in the 1960s, and he put his horse through his paces without halter or bridle.”

Buford Clark and his brother Henry were both highly regarded trainers in California during those years, and Bab credited his friend with many of the training secrets he had learned. Bab’s years of riding the ranges and working cattle had also given him a great store of philosophy, and he liked especially to work with horses that had issues, or that other trainers had been unsuccessful with. Bab’s students would often describe problems they were having with their horse, and he would ask them to ride and do certain things, while he observed carefully. He had an ability to “read” the horse from its body language, and invariably seemed to know just the trick to fix a frustrating problem, and liked to devise ways so the horse would teach itself. One of his methods for sacking out a horse would be to tie its tail to a ring on the bridle, and then turn it loose in the round pen, alternating sides and gradually tying it shorter to sack the horse out a little at a time.

Carol Farberson, Joanna Hender, and Joanne Swift are among Bab’s students who still remember Bab and the many things he taught them quite vividly.

Carol Farberson, shares her memories of working with Bab:

“Bab was an amazing horseman and a very kind and generous person. I spent a couple of years working with Bab once a week before he moved from Danville to Colfax. He also put on some training clinics for our Tri-Valley Trailblazers club in Livermore and gave group riding lessons for us for a while. I learned an incredible amount from him. I met Bab when I was taking lessons from Sandy Cleveland in Livermore. I had my first Morgan, R J American Lad (Mr. America x Ann Bregman). Sandy took me to a Junior Morgan Horse Club show at Bab’s place. I really didn’t know what I was doing, but was thrilled to meet Bab. I had heard stories about his

MORGANS BAB TRAINED



Top to bottom: Bab and Orcland Oh Darling (Casland Ben Don x Orcland Ann Darling); Joanna Hender Livermore and Kellys Dapper Denae (Dapper Dan x Amber Lady), rodeo grounds, 1984; Bab and Fonda KR, CA Expo, 1973; Bab and Dusty Silverton \ (Silverton Morgan x Princess Firefly), Lodi, CA, 1966; Bab and Count Basie, Santa Rosa, CA, 1990; Bab and Jubilee Jazz (Eco Jubilo x Bonnie Heather). Photos courtesy June Verdugo, Joanna Hender & Joanne Curtis.

horses, especially a palomino stallion that he would send out into his arena to do figure 8's, then back into his stall on command from where ever he was. My first lesson was ground driving Lad in Bab's covered arena. With a click and a tap, Lad sort of shifted his feet and thought about moving and after further encouragement he started meandering along. Stopping was similar—a "whoa" and pull on the reins got a twitch of the ears and several repeats led to a slow and restful stop. Bab looked at me and said, "You feed this horse well and take good care for him. He should work for you. He is not working." Then he took the lines and buggy whip, gave a soft "click" and followed it up with a sharp crack of the whip when Lad did his usual slow shift of gears. To stop, Bab said a soft "whoa" then sat back on the reins when Lad didn't stop. Lad nearly sat down! It only took two times of that process to have Lad start out at a brisk walk and stop on a dime when asked softly. What a different response! No more nagging or picking at him!

"After my driving lesson, I would tie Lad up and follow Bab around for the rest of the day helping him with the National Park Service Morgans. He used to get a batch of them at a time as they reached about four years old. The national park horses from Point Reyes National Seashore were nearly untouched. Bab would put them in his tie stalls and lead them to water a few times a day. The horses were totally dependent on him for everything. We would tie one of them to a good stout fence and spray water on them to "sack them out". It was an art to be able to move the spray in such a way to keep the horse from either pulling back or bolting into the fence. They soon learned that being touched all over was not scary after all and even nice on a hot summer day! Then we would switch to a long rope to swing gently over and under them, adding a rag or plastic bag as they got used to the feel of things bumping around. When Bab still had the pony drill team, he said he would have the kids walk behind the tie stalls waving flags and banging things. Those national park Morgans became as bomb proof as possible for the rangers to ride where ever they went.

"Bab trained his horses to be so light on the bit, collected and responsive. They were a thrill to ride. He expected them to perform sharply and energetically, whether driving or doing Western work, then to stop and stand quietly.

"Bab was incredibly generous with his time and knowledge, gently teasing with a twinkle in his eye. He taught me to mend harness, how to dally a lead line properly and to pony a young energetic horse to keep it in place and avoid problems, how to tie reins to stirrups to get a horse to teach itself to bend and give to the bit, how to work with a frightened or bad mannered horse to get it to turn its head to you and come forward, and so very much more."

Joanna Hender, another of Bab's students recalls:

"I met one of Bab's students, Carol Garberson, when she was giving lessons at a ranch where I had leased a horse. We became

friends and she invited me to one of her lessons with Bab. Little did I know at the time what a great mentor he would be. I was impressed with Bab's knowledge, communication and great sense of humor. After the lesson, Bab asked if I'd like to have a courtesy lesson on one of his Western in-training horses. The horse was the most light, responsive horse I'd ever had the privilege to ride. I felt like I was driving a Lamborghini with a driver's permit. It was then I determined to have my own horse to ride with Bab. I talked with him; he suggested I go to Fran Kellstrom in Modesto, as her foals were sired by Kelly's Dapper Dan, and he passed on his wonderful temperament.

"I visited Fran who took me to see her sale horses. I saw a doe-eyed, beautiful, sweet, Kelly's Dapper Denae. It was love at first sight. Fran let me trade a handful of inherited jewelry for her. Now with "Babe," I proudly joined the Trailblazers out of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Carol Garberson was already a member. I met several other ladies in the club. I don't remember how, but we ladies met as a group to take lessons from Bab. Riding Babe and having Bab teach us was a joy. My favorite lesson was on the flying lead change. Bab was very gregarious and filled the lessons with his stories and always present sense of humor. He also put on clinics, and we would attend. Bab and our group became good friends. In later years when he and his wife moved to Grass Valley, he kept in touch with us by phone."

Another close friend who became acquainted with Bab during the Danville years is highly regarded Morgan trainer Garn Walker, known for producing dozens of world champion Morgans and, especially, for his beautifully trained Western pleasure horses. "Bab was just a great horseman," Garn recalls. "I met Bab more than 35 years ago, when they were in Danville. He was an old California Vaquero style horseman, and that was my background as well. We had a mutual friend in Chief Rojas**—I was very fortunate to be mentioned by the Chief in one of his books when I was just 21 years old. Bab and I would have many long discussions on the use of the romel and other aspects of vaquero training.

"Perhaps one of the best stories I can remember about Bab is a stallion he had. I can't recall the horse's name now, but he had him trained to do all kinds of things just on voice commands. He would set up these two by six planks across the arena, and call the horse to come out of his stall and walk on these planks. He would get to the end, and Bab would tell him, "now, do it right!" and the horse would turn around and walk all the way back, keeping his feet on the planks and never touching the ground. Then he would send him back into his stall.

"Another thing Bab was very good at was floating the horses' teeth, and he would come around and do that for us. He had a lot of unique skills and was very talented. "Garn concludes, "I have many special memories of Bab, mostly the memories of a great horseman that are in my heart."

**Arnold "Chief" Rojas, 1896-1988, is widely recognized as being one of the great ethnic writers of history, as well as the author of the most complete chronicles of history and ways of the California Vaquero—all documented from his personal experiences and stories he knew first hand of the men he rode and worked with for more than fifty years. Rojas wrote seven books in all, which he did not start publishing until he was in his mid-50s. Many of his stories feature the early California Morgans, with which he was well acquainted.

THE COLFAX RANCH

Another horse Bab trained very successfully was the bay stallion Lippitt Gregory (Lippitt George Moro x Lippitt Ethan Ann). Gregory was bred by Robert Knight, and had been owned by W T Carter, siring a total of 56 foals. Bab bought him in 1972, and when he and June left Danville in 1979, they added several more horses from Ethyl Stephenson, and moved to a new ranch near Colfax.

Carol Farberson recalls, "It was a tiny house in the woods with a barn/arena and then paddocks scattered between the trees. He had another open arena up the hill a ways and he carried big loppers or a saw as he rode around the property to clear branches and brush to make trails to ride and drive on."

Joanna Hender adds, "On a visit to his new ranch, Bab showed a horse in training that bolted every time he was mounted. I asked him how he was training this horse to not run off. Bab said that he opened all the gates in the pastures, and every morning he would get on and let him run as fast and far as he wanted; whatever ground he covered, he had to cover on the way back home, no matter how tired he was. Bab said he wasn't running as far as he used to, and the trip was getting shorter by the day."

During this time, Bab also trained several horses for Joanne Stewart of the Stewart Ranch in Olema, CA. Among these were the mare Orcland Oh Darling (Casland Ben Don x Orcland Ann Darling), and the stallion Orcland Ben Hur (Casland Ben Don x Helen Of Troy). Meanwhile, the new horses Bab and June purchased were the gelding Patrick LG Carter (Lippitt Gregory x Cherry River), and three mares, Haylie LG Carter (Lippitt Gregory x Halabart), Cherub LG Carter (Lippitt Gregory x C-Bart Carter), and Iona's Imp BL Carter (Brown Leaf x Iona B Carter). They produced several foals, breeding the new mares to Orcland Ben Hur.

Among the later horses Bab trained, were Dragonfire Ct Basie (UC Viscount x Madriver Windsong), and E F M Desperado (EFM Odin x Woodside Celebrity). "Count Basie" found in Bab a trainer who understood him as no other had, and began to show his best, winning in driving and roadster classes in the early 1990s. Desperado, also trained as a driving horse by Bab, went on to become a very successful dressage horse.

Finally, Bab and June retired to Grass Valley, California.

Joanna Hender concludes: "When he was honored with a plaque in Grass Valley at the fairgrounds, we ladies from the Trailblazer club were invited. It was so nice to see all the people who knew, loved and admired him all in one place. It was there that he introduced me to Eitan Beth-Halachmy as his best friend, and one of the greatest trainers he'd ever known. Not too long after that, the Trailblazer ladies all met and attended Bab's memorial in Grass Valley. In his last phone calls, Bab shared some of his life as a vaquero herding cattle over the hills and through the Livermore Valley. There were no fences. He is a part of history." ■

Author's note: I never had the privilege of knowing Bab Verdugo during his lifetime, but ironically, when I met his wife June, she showed me a poem that some of Bab's friends had contributed for a memorial of Bab in the SVMHC Inc. Hoof Prints because it reminded them of

Bab so much. She thought it was interesting I was writing this article, as the poem was one I had written myself years earlier:

The Last Trail

I often see in the distance

That trail we all someday must ride.

*The fork that I want is the right one,
where the way is narrow, not wide.*

*It winds through the purple mountains,
where the going is rugged and steep.*

*But all I can take along for the ride
Are the memories I treasure and keep.*

There's no turning back once I start on that trail,

So I pray Lord, I'm ready to go.

*It's a journey that's swiftly decided;
when it comes, we never may know.*

*I will come to that last final viewpoint,
where I look on my life down below.*

*There I'll pause for a prayer for my loved ones,
who will follow me someday I know.*

*Give them the comfort to know, Lord,
that I will be with you.*

*Keep them safe, I pray, from harm,
and their spirits right and true.*

*Bless their lives with all that is good,
and help them on their way.*

*They too will one day ride this trail,
and we'll meet again someday.*

I pray Lord that you'll keep me humble,

and always ready to ride,

*the last trail across the great chasm
that leads to the Other side.*

*I'll keep the old saddle polished,
and dust off my boots and my spurs;
and keep the pad and blanket clean,
and free from little burrs.*

*My horse is always ready to go;
his courage is always true.*

*I pray like him, I will learn to trust
For the Lord will see me through.*

The sun sinks low on those purple hills,

I must go now, without fail.

*I've heard the Master's final call,
"Son, it's time to ride the last trail."*

Many thanks to Bab's wife, June Verdugo for sharing her photo albums of Bab; also to Joanne Curtis for sharing many additional historic photos of Bab, and stories from her long personal acquaintance with him. Also, thanks to Joanna Hender, Carol Garberson, Joanne Swift, Garn Walker, and Eitan and Deb Beth-Halachmy for helping to tell Bab's story.